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ABSTRACT

The Europe of the 21, an organization of Western European countries, recently recognized equal political rights for men and women. Yet, a second achievement, without which the first will be meaningless, has yet to be attained: providing women with effective ways of asserting their rights and ensuring that they are no longer excluded, in practice, from democracy. This report suggests two main ways to achieve equal power-sharing between men and women in politics. The first way is through education. This means educating people to accept a different division of roles and of labor between the sexes, as well as teaching people about democracy. The second mechanism of change involves a different approach to politics. Several means of making politics more democratic are suggested, including public funding for political parties, encouraging turnover and sharing of elective office, and making the senior civil service more democratic. Pragmatic ways of involving women in politics also are suggested including the co-opting of women to top government posts and the use of quotas as a means of forcing the doors to political assemblies and parties. (DB)

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EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN

EG (89) 4

Ways and means of improving the position of women in political life

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Strasbourg 1989

WAYS AND MEANS OF IMPROVING

THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN POLITICAL LIFE

by

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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN

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INTRODUCTION

The "Europe of the 21" (1) recently recognised, at long last, fully (2) equal political rights for men and women. It has still, however, to fulfil a second objective, failing which the achievement of the first will be meaningless: to provide women with effective ways of asserting their rights and ensuring that they are no longer excluded, in practice, from democracy.

Since 1975, which marked the start of the United Nations Decade for Women, international organisations have done much to achieve this end: plans and proposals for action have been drawn up with a view to ensuring that States promote, by various means, the participation of women in the political decision-making process. Equality between women and men has long been a guiding principle for the intergovernmental activities of the Council of Europe, which has striven, in particular, to promote women's role and involvement in politics.

Thirteen years after the start of the United Nations Decade for Women and six months before the second European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men in Vienna, the obvious question is: What is the state of power-sharing between men and women in politics? Have international organisaions' efforts been successful and have the member states heeded their recommendations and, in certain cases, injunctions? To take stock in detail of the situation would in itself require thorough research and a bulky report. Failing that, a table comparing the past and present proportions of women in the lower houses of parliament in each country provides a brief initial picture of the situation (see table below).

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(1) All the West European countries represented at the Council of Europe: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the United Kingdom. San Marino's accession as the 22nd member state of the organisation in November 1988 was too recent for that country to be taken into account in this study.

(2) Fully equal except in two Swiss cantons (Appenzell - Inner Rhoden and Appenzell - Outer Rhoden), which still deny women the vote in cantonal elections, but belatedly equal, since nine countries did not give women full political citizenship until after the Second World War: it was not until 1968 in Portugal, 1971 in Switzerland and 1984 in Liechtenstein.

Percentage of women in the lower houses of parliament in the 21 Council of Europe member states

	AT PRESENT		IN THE PAST		DIFFERENCE (in % points)		
	%	Year	1975	1945 or 1946	1945-75	1975-88	1945-88
1. Norway	34.4	1985	15.5	4.6	+ 10.9	+ 18.9	+ 29.8
2. Sweden	30.9	1985	21.4	7.8	+ 13.6	+ 9.5	+ 23.1
3. Denmark	29.0	1987	15.6	5.3	+ 10.3	+ 13.4	+ 23.7
4. Iceland	20.6	1987	2.8	1.6	+ 1.2	+ 17.8	+ 19.0
5. Netherlands	20.0	1986	9.3	4.0	+ 5.3	+ 10.7	+ 16.0
6. Federal Republic of Germany	15.4	1987	5.6	6.8 (1949)	- 1.2	+ 9.8	+ 8.6
7. Luxembourg	14.6	1984	5.1	?	?	+ 9.5	?
8. Switzerland	14.0	1987	7.5	-	-	+ 6.5	-
9. Italy	12.8	1987	3.8	3.7	+ 0.1	+ 9.0	+ 9.1
10. Austria	10.9	1986	7.6	5.4	+ 2.2	+ 3.3	+ 5.5
11. Belgium	8.5	1987	6.6	1.5	+ 5.1	+ 1.9	+ 7.0
12. Ireland	8.4	1987	2.8	2.1 (1944)	+ 0.7	+ 5.6	+ 6.3
13. Portugal	7.6	1987	8.0	1.6	+ 6.4	- 0.4	+ 6.0
14. Liechtenstein	6.6	1986	0.0	-	-	+ 6.6	-
15. Spain	6.4	1986	6.0	?	?	+ 0.4	-
16. United Kingdom	6.3	1987	4.2	3.7	+ 0.5	+ 2.1	+ 2.6
17. France	5.7	1988	1.6	6.9	- 5.3	+ 4.1	- 1.2
18. Greece	4.3	1985	2.0	-	-	+ 2.3	-
19. Malta	2.9	1987	3.6	2.5	+ 1.1	- 0.7	+ 0.4
20. Turkey	1.3	1987	2.0	0.7	+ 1.3	- 0.7	+ 0.6
21. Cyprus	1.2	1985	0.0	-	-	+ 1.2	-

An examination of the table suggests that the countries fall into three geographical groups:

1. A leading group comprising the four Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands stands out. In these countries the two salient features are:

- the high proportion of women in the lover house - between 20% and 34%,

- a large increase since the War, which became steeper from 1975 onwards (1).

2. Then there is a group of four countries in which women occupy between 12% and 15% of the seats and where this percentage of women is the result of recent progress (over the last 13 years), but where the number of women in Parliament remained the same or even declined between 1945 and 1975. The Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and Switzerland fall into this category.

3. Lastly, there is a large, motley group of 12 countries in which the proportion of women in the lover house is small (between 6% and 10%) or very small (between 1% and 5%) and, in particular, has not increased much either since 1945 or since 1975. While there has been slight progress in such countries as Austria and France, the situation has remained virtually unchanged in, for instance, Belgium, Greece, Spain and the United Kingdom, and it has actually deteriorated in Malta, Portugal and Turkey.

Succinct though this classification may be - since it takes account of only one criterion (2) - the number of seats held by women in lover houses of parliament - it highlights the areas where progress has been made and reveals those where the situation has remained unchanged or has actually deteriorated. In any event, it shows that over half the Council of Europe member states (including countries with a long-standing democratic tradition, such as France and the United Kingdom) have showed little resolve since the mid-1970s to make room for women in their parliaments.

Although, having taken stock of the situation, we cannot conclude that international action has been ineffective, it must be said that it has been only relatively effective. If the Council of Europe's credibility as a source of ideas and advice is not to be undermined, the impact of the recommendations and resolutions it adopts needs to be better asserted in the future. It might well be useful if the Council regularly took stock of the measures actually introduced by the various countries in particular fields and recorded women's progress (as regards party leadership and membership of elected national and regional assemblies, town councils, etc). If they were published and widely circulated, such reports might themselves be educational, in so far as states would see them rather as "rolls of honour" in which they were among the first ... or the last. They would thus be punished for failing to act on Council of Europe recommendations by the publicity given to the fact.

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(1) Except in Sweden, where the rise in the number of women in Parliament has slowed down somewhat in recent years.

(2) A criterion which, it must be said, provides a telling picture of women's place in a country's politics.

Of the wide range of means of promoting women's involvement in political decision-making, two kinds of measures have been suggested or used in the past:

- Firstly, there are measures aimed at the general public, and not just women. These include both long-term measures (educational measures and measures to change attitudes through the family, school, advertising and the media) and short-term measures affecting the political system itself, designed to facilitate universal access to positions of political responsibility.

- Secondly, there are affirmative action measures geared to women (ie measures to remedy the existing situation by giving preferential treatment to women so as to establish equality, in practice, between men and women. So far these have been used mainly in the field of occupational equality, usualy with success (1).

As Dorothea Gaudard points out, the term "affirmative action" "emerged from the Civil Rights Movement in the US in the early sixties", the aim being "to correct employment systems which [discriminated] against minority groups". There is an urgent need to extend action of this kind to politics which is the area least receptive to a balance between the sexes, if not the most male-oriented sector. In certain circumstances, where there is a blatant barrier, compulsory remedial measures are the only way of enabling women to make up for centuries of being political nonentities.

Far from being mutually exclusive, these two types of measures should be used jointly and in tandem. In view, however, of the many and varied misgivings which affirmative action in favour of women elicits among elected representatives and political leaders, it seems desirable, whenever it is possible to choose in a particular sector, always to give preference to general measures rather than to measures aimed at particular categories. For instance, the French Act of 30 December 1985, which prohibited people from holding office simultaneously in more than two capacities proved extremely effective in providing wider access to the leadership elite, not least for women. A form of affirmative action, for example appealing to people holding office in more than one capacity to be public-spirited and give up one of their posts, possibly to a woman, would have got nowhere.

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(1) Occupational equality will not be dealt with here, but any policy to promote such equality in practice clearly helps, indirectly, to facilitate women's access to public office, for there is no denying that the fact that women are economically disadvantaged contributes to their being left on the fringe of politics. See Janine Mossuz-Lavau and Mariette Sineau, Enquête sur les femmes et la politique en France, Paris, PUF, 1983.

An attempt has been made below to take stock of some of the work and studies already carried out at the Council of Europe (1).

I. UPSTREAM FROM POLITICS: EDUCATION

> "Science moves fast and forges straight ahead, but the public image of science does not keep pace with it: it is centuries behind, and misconceptions are perpetuated by the government, the popular press and established values" (2).

It is culture that has excluded women from politics, and it is culture that must draw them back to it. In her closing speech at the 1986 Athens Conference on Women in Local and Regional Life, Melina Mercouri, Greek Minister for Cultural Affairs and Science, rightly stressed this side of the question. This starting point - these foundations on which everything else depends - cannot be overlooked. Any strategy for achieving political power-sharing between men and women must therefore begin with an educational policy-making provision for long-term action to change mentalities, the main aim being to ensure that the theory of the two spheres - a public sphere primarily reserved for men and a private sphere mainly reserved for women, is completely discredited. If we are to break with this ideology, two types of action must be taken:

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(1) In particular:

- Study on "The situation of women in the political process in Europe", Part II: Women in the political world in Europe, by Janine Mossuz-Lavau and Mariette Sineau, Council of Europe, Human Rights, Strasbourg, 1984, and report by the Committee of Experts on The Situation of Women in the Political Process - A programme for action in the Council of Europe, Council of Europe, Human Rights, Strasbourg, 1985, document H (85) 4.

- Proceedings of the first European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men (Strasbourg, 4 March 1986), Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 1986.

- Proceedings of the Conference on Women in Local and Regional Life - Equal participation by women in policy-making at local and regional level (Athens, 10-12 September 1986), Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 1987.

- Report on the status and working conditions of local and regional elected representatives, Rapporteur: Mr A de la Moussaye, 18th Session of the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (Strasbourg, 18-20 October 1983), document CPL (18) 6.

- Compendium of documents, 2nd Strasbourg Conference on Parliamentary Democracy (28-30 September 1987), Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 1987.

(2) Roland Barthes, Mythologies.

- People must be taught a different division of labour and of roles between the sexes and therefore, in the long term, to share out power more fairly between men and women;

- The general public, both men and women, must be educated and trained in democracy, so that participation in democracy is not confined to those who are well-off.

A. Educating people to accept a different division of roles and of labour between the sexes

1. Putting across other values through the family, school, advertising, the media, etc

For centuries, our Western societies have been based on a rigid division of power between the sexes, which has given rise to lasting social and moral standards for male and female roles. Any government that wants to take effective action to prevent the idea that female roles are somewhat inferior from becoming entrenched in society should concentrate on a strategy for putting across other values to people via all the intermediaries between society and the individual. The means whereby old values are perpetuated are familiar and have been set down in black and white, so we know in which areas action must be taken and pressure must be brought to bear. As stated in the report presented by the French delegation at the First Ministerial Conference on Equality, "Sexist stereotypes are conveyed from early childhood through the family, children's books, school books and educational and teaching methods, and later through the press, advertising and the media". (1) It is common knowledge that comments bearing the stamp of the most trite, and one might say the most banal, form of sexism can be heard daily in a wide variety of institutions, parties and political assemblies (2), international colloquies, and so on. To take one of many examples, at the above-mentioned Athens Conference, there was a delegate - a man with the title of Professor - who ended a statement on feminism (!) with these words:

> "Women may also learn to become mothers again, kind and charitable, the only creatures capable of achieving the miracle of snatching all the young adolescents' lives out of the grip of the hydra which threatens to exterminate them: namely the street, a place of danger, violence and perdition." (3)

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(1) Proceedings of the European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 1986, p. 87.

(2) The survey I conducted in France among female parliamentarians and city mayors and women in positions of national responsibility in political parties showed that sexism and misogyny are inherent in French politics. See Mariette Sineau, Des femmes en politique, Paris, Economica, 1988.

(3) These are incredibly provocative (or thoughtless) words when one considers that they were pronounced at a meeting on equal participation by women in local policy-making. They are reproduced without comment in the Proceedings of the Athens Conference on Women in Local and Regional Life - Equal participation by women in policy-making at local and regional level, Strasbourg, 1987, p. 201.

a. Action

- Action at school and in other educational institutions, from playschool to university, including secondary school, is one of the top priority measures if boys and girls are to identify with male and female models other than the rigid, outdated ones with which they are still usually presented.

- The content of education therefore needs to change at all levels. The idea is both to remove the most blatant sexism from children's books and school textbooks and to revise history as it is written and taught, for, given "the way that lessons are taught and the way that books are written, the male constitutes the seen face of the moon and the female the unseen". (1) To take a classic example, history books would be more objective if, in the chapter on the achievement of universal suffrage, they also talked of women's struggle to obtain full political citizenship. The celebration of the bicentenary of the French Revolution is a golden opportunity to promote, in schools, a reassessment of women's role in this event, which marked the beginning of a new era, and of the revolutionaries' policy towards women. Similarly, the very belated devolution of the most elementary civil rights to women should have a prominent position in history syllabuses. Although the research carried out on women over the last 15 years (incidentally, this research should be continued, which is not always the case in universities) has done much to put women back into history as fully-fledged members of society, it has still to be properly incorporated in history as it is taught. Experience shows that syllabuses are often somewhat slow to adapt to new research findings and even to the truly contemporary social situation. Is the "female revolution" of the last 30 years (massive numbers of women entering the paid employment market, spectacular academic success, birth control, etc) always included in official curricula? Committees and working parties responsible for revieving educational content must, of course, include women members if school curricula are to be revised in a non-sexist way. (2)

- Teacher training should, of course, be revieved in the light of changes in curricula. Surely there is also an urgent need to familiarise teachers with the main international declarations and conventions designed to combat sexism? Since this offence is not punishable under domestic law, it is particularly important that teachers should be familiar with these international instruments, in particular Articles 5 and 10 of the United Nations Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

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(1) Melina Mercouri, Proceedings of the Athens Conference, op. cit. p. 169.

(2) In France, Lionel Jospin, Minister of Education, recently appointed 10 "think tanks" to revise and trim school curricula. The leaders of these "think tanks" are "eminent academics and distinguished people from the sciences and the arts" who - the press omits to point out - are all men.

There are, admittedly, Ministerial circulars (1) reaffirming the need to combat sexism, but are these really sufficient?

- Career guidance at school and vocational training should be such as to put an end, once and for all, to occupational segregation between men and women, which, in turn, fuels conservative attitudes and ideologies. Statistics for schools and the economy still provide a telling picture of the imbalance between men and women in the various courses of study and occupations, even in the countries with the highest level of technical and intellectual training for women. In France girls do better academically, but most of them are still guided towards some thirty occupations, whereas boys are pointed towards nearly 300 different occupations. The same is true in many other countries.

- Pressure must also, of course, be put on advertisers and the media, so that these influential purveyors of ideology put across images of women other than those of mothers bringing up children and wives offering solace and buying products.

Advertisers, in particular, will stop at no sexist extremes in order to "sell" (when women from Quebec first arrive in a country like France, they are shocked by the overt misogyny in advertisements - television commercials, cinema advertisements, posters, etc).

If they are to be less overtly sexist, the media (radio, television and the press) must make an effort to appear more feminist. This is abundantly clear from the Proceedings of the Seminar on the Contribution of the Media to the Promotion of Equality Between Women and Men (2).

Let it simply be reaffirmed that, if they are to deserve the title of opinion leaders and become instruments of social change, some of them should offer the public more information about sexism and violence against women, and, of course, portray women more often in non-traditional (political or occupational) roles.

Lastly, it is common knowledge that the best way to ensure that women's interests are taken into account in the media, as in politics, is to have more women on governing bodies.

b. Implementation

It is impossible to plead too strongly in favour of the establishment of independent Ministries with proper financial resources for pursuing, in the countries concerned, an overall policy of educating people to accept a different division of roles between the sexes and to combat sexism. There are two prerequisites if such a policy is to succeed:

- Across-the-board action in fields covered by several Ministries musts be launched;

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(1) Prompted by Committee of Ministers Recommendation No. R (85) 7 to Council of Europe member states on teaching and learning about human rights in schools. Cf, in France, the circular of 22 May 1985 issued by the Ministry of Education.

(2) Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 1984, 205 pages.

- The policy must be pursued by a ministerial department (or at any rate an official body) that is sufficiently powerful to have undisputed authority and ensure that new legislation is passed. Even if the latter prerequisite is fulfilled, it is never easy to put action of this kind into practice, particularly when it comes to combating sexism (in France, Yvette Roudy, Minister for Women's Rights, failed in her attempt to pass her anti-sexist bill, for there was a general outcry on the part of advertisers and the press and, indeed, virtually throughout the media).

Experience in other countries shows that the established Ministries (such as the Ministry of Education) are quite capable of providing the necessary impetus if given the resources they need to do so. In Denmark the Ministry of Education was the prime mover of a successful affirmative action programme concerning education, training and advancement for women. There is another lesson to be learnt from Denmark's experience: if a policy of this kind is to be effective, the main prerequisite is that integrated action should be taken. In this particular case, the Danish Ministry ensured that campaigns to inform the public, teachers, careers advisors and schoolgirls were closely linked with training schemes. (1)

Quite apart from acting as a driving force, these Ministries should be equipped:

- to disseminate information and promote nation-wide public campaigns (by means of television advertisements, posters, etc) geared to all sections of the population and all families: both campaigns designed to improve the balance of men and women in the various occupations and campaigns to foster awareness of the need to combat sexism;

- To monitor the practical effectiveness of the action taken (by arranging for the content of children's books and school textbooks to be scientifically checked at regular intervals, by on-the-spot evaluation of the educational, training and occupational options open to women, and by the regular dissemination of statistics showing whether or not progress has been made in improving the balance between the sexes in the various occupations).

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(1) "This link, and the fact that the information campaigns have had a wide target population ... may account for the initial success of the Danish training schemes. As a result of the efforts of the Ministry of Education, there are more girls receiving non-traditional training, either at university (eg in mathematics) or in the form of technical courses." See Andrée Michel, Positive Action for the Benefit of Women, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 1986 Document EG (86) 1, p. 41.

Clearly, however, if Ministerial action is to be effective, it must be backed up by action by various associations and lobbies. As the Minister Yvette Roudy pointed out at the First European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men, "Recent history has shown that governments [cannot] do everything. That [is] the main lesson to be drawn from the UN Decade for Women. Women's associations and NGOs must be active, urge governments to adopt appropriate policies ..." (1) For instance, could consumer associations not be more active in combating advertising conceptions by threatening to boycott products advertised in an unduly sexist way?

Lastly, could government action not be backed up by action by a national committee of independent people, which would be responsible for monitoring and impartially supervising a number of activities (eg checking that school curricula and text books are unbiased)?

2. A different division of labour

> "A problem in gaining power is that the very thing we want to transform, changing the relation of the genders to political power and reproductive labour, is one of the major obstacles in gaining power. It is very difficult to organise a campaign, attend meetings, write brochures, read political theory while washing diapers, dispensing cough syrup, cooking meals, nursing sick relatives, cleaning house and providing the emotional needs of family members. To mention a few tasks of women." (2)

a. Measures

All these surveys show that in most countries couples are only beginning to share the housework and the bringing up of children, and that these tasks fall largely, if not entirely, to women, who are rushed off their feet and overworked. (3) Women's "second big revolution - the first one being contraception" (4) - will be to change this division of labour.

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(1) Proceedings of the First European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men, op. cit. p. 128.

(2) Margarita Papandreou, addressing the Athens Conference, Proceedings of the Athens Conference, op. cit. p. 155.

(3) Single mothers are no better off. In France, a study by the CERC (Cost Research Centre) states: "Single mothers - for the 'single parent' is almost always a woman - are more likely to have paid employment than women living as part of a couple, and to work full-time. They often have menial jobs: 40% of them are skilled manual workers, cleaning women or child-minders. Moreover, they often live a long way from their work, in less well-appointed housing, and they go on holiday less often". Le Monde, 15 July 1987.

(4) Huguette Bouchardeau, statement at the Feyzin colloquy, 31 January 1987. "Mais qu'est-ce qu'elles veulent ... le pouvoir", report, p. 11.

Failing a radical change in the behaviour patterns of individual men - which is unlikely - the only immediate way to relieve the strain on women is for the community to look after the children. The policy so far can be summed up, without undue simplification, in the words of Ségolène Royal - a French parliamentarian and mother of three small children who, on becoming a member of the National Assembly in June 1988, expressed surprise at the fact that it did not have a day nursery: "All in all, decision-makers have always, by and large, considered that children should be looked after free of charge and, more specificially, by their mothers, who bear sole responsibility for this." (1) If we really want to achieve equal rights for men and women in everyday life, we need a "new social contract" (2), which solemnly acknowledges the fact that:

1. Women have the same right as men to paid employment;

2. The community is therefore partly responsible for providing facilities for looking after young children.

Without going into detail, let us mention two of the main measures that need to be taken:

- There should be more (free) public facilities - crèches, day nurseries and playschools - for children of pre-school age (0 to 3) and, of course, nursery schools for 4-to-6-year-olds. Here there seems to be a considerable demand. For instance, in France, which is far from the most backward country in this respect, the government recently took stock of the situation and reported: "At present there are 780,000 pre-school children under the age of 3 whose parents work. There are only 135,000 places in day nurseries, and 200,000 children are looked after by child-minders". (3) It should be added that the government should also have a policy for ensuring that men are recruited among day nursery staff if the socialisation of small children is to be more balanced and both sexes are to be represented in all occupations, not least those involving what is known as "mothering".

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(1) Ségolène Royal, "Enfants seuls après l'école", Le Monde, 11 October 1988.

(2) Melina Mercouri, Proceedings of the Athens Conference, op. cit., p. 168.

(3) See Le Monde of 1 September 1988: "La politique familiale met l'accent sur l'accueil des jeunes enfants" (Family policy concentrates on child-minding facilities).

- Bringing school hours and working hours into line seems to be the second mesure urgently needed in order to avoid conflicting pressures on working mothers and fathers and prevent children from being left on their own after school (out of 8 million French children under the age of 12, two million are on their own after school, in the absence of available close relatives, grandparents, neighbours and child-minding facilities. (1) In some countries school hours do not fit in with normal working hours at all. It is as though governments were refusing to accept the consequences of the new social situation, in which there are more and more young couples with children in which both husband and wife want to exercise permanent paid employment. As a result of this political omission, it is usually women who are forced to adapt their work to family needs, sacrificing any career worthy of the name. In the Federal Republic of Germany, which is a rich and industrially developed country, women seem to be reaching the height of discontent: day nurseries and nursery schools are few and far between and expensive, yet primary and secondary schools take charge of the children only in the mornings, and school meals are non-existent! In the circumstances, it is understandable that 94% of part-time jobs should be done by women.

b. Implementation

It is impossible to implement these measures - which are expensive - quickly in every country without a clearly affirmed political resolve to do so. It must be said that this resolve has proved shaky, particularly in times of economic recession. History shows that recessions and attempts to make women stay at home have always gone hand-in-hand. (2) The policy followed in France by the first socialist governments (1981-86) is fairly representative of the climate during the recession of recent years: instead of creating the "n" thousand day-nursery places (cf. the proposals put forward by François Mitterrand when he was standing for President of the Republic in 1981), preference was given to the introduction of parental leave for parents bringing up children, in the secret hope that this measure would indirectly help to curb unemployment. When the conservatives were in power (1986-88), this policy was merely strengthened: Michèle Barzach, State Minister of Health and Family Affairs, went so far as to introduce a "social status for mothers".

The fact that the overwhelming majority of decision-makers are men - and, in most cases, men who are relieved of all domestic and child-rearing problems - certainly does nothing to ensure that the building of day nurseries is seen as a priority political issue. (Indeed, one of the reasons why women want to be widely represented in places where decisions are taken is to change political priorities). We can only hope that governments will soon realise that paid female employment is here to stay, despite the economic recession, and that the current signs that we are reaching the end of the recession will prompt them, in the coming years, to earmark a larger proportion of the budget to providing child-minding facilities.

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(1) Ségolène Royal, "Enfants seuls après l'école", Le Monde

(2) Ségolène Royal, op. cit. above.

Detailed comparative studies of child-minding arrangements for small children in each of the West European countries (with an attempt to quantify needs and accurately gauge the extent to which mothers are overworked and children are left on their own) would do much to clarify the situation. If widely disseminated, such studies could also help to foster political awareness of the fact that the community cannot shirk its child-minding responsibilities.

Lastly, alongside this policy of large-scale investment - which would do much to help women in the immediate future but nothing to change male behaviour patterns - it would seem that there is an urgent need for governments to launch public campaigns on the theme "Children also need their fathers" so that decision-makers - the fathers, who tend to get home after the "little ones" have gone to bed - cannot fail to be aware of what is now accepted by psychologists, namely that an "absent" father has disastrous effects on the child's development. (1)

B. TEACHING PEOPLE ABOUT DEMOCRACY

1. Action

The aim is to put across a different image of politics to the public, take away its sacred aura and make it into something simple, concrete and intelligible. The idea is to give politics back its original meaning of things public, accessible to everyone and a matter for involvement by everyone, both men and women. To this end, everyone should be able, from a very early age, to acquire the knowledge needed to understand politics and be properly initiated into democracy. This is the only way to ensure that democracy is no longer an empty word, but a standard experienced and conformed to in everyday life. Schools would obviously be a driving force for the achievement of such an objective, even though we know full well that "schooling is not a panacea for society's ills". (2) Attention is drawn, in this connection, to the excellent paper presented by Robert Stradling at the 2nd Strasbourg Conference on Parliamentary Democracy, which suggests various ways of improving the contribution which the education system as it stands makes to the development of the individual.

a. The democratic classroom

There is no point in teaching pupils about the theory of democracy unless they see from classroom practice that democracy works. The prerequisite for any form of political tuition is therefore to introduce more genuine democracy between the teachers and the taught. Robert Stradling points out that examples of democratic classrooms in the world are hardly legion (he quotes a few cases in Scandinavia, Italy and the United States). Yet there is no reason why one should not contemplate a few steps which would help to bridge the gap between "the rhetoric of political education and the actual practice in classrooms". They include:

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(1) One example of the many studies on the subject: Christiane Olivier, Les enfants de Jocaste, Paris, Denoël, 1987.

(2) Discussion paper for Workshop 5: Education for democratic citizenship, 2nd Strasbourg Conference on Parliamentary Democracy (28-30 September 1987), Compendium of Documents, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 1987. pp. 157-169.

- Involving pupils in the running of the school;

- Developing procedures for consulting the pupils and for negotiation between pupils and teachers;

- Encouraging pupils to express their views, work together on projects, take part in group discussions and help one another to learn.

Admittedly, learning about democracy at school takes a long time and is ridden with pitfalls, but there is no alternative. Governments should bear in mind the fact that schools which provide no opportunities of this kind will fail to put across to pupils "the idea of political literacy". (1)

b. Political and civic education in schools

If schools are to provide a better grounding in democracy, they must not only provide political information but also, in particular, teach pupils working and analytical methods. So far, civic education has been designed mainly to pass on knowledge ... about institutions, systems, parties and, sometimes, political issues. It is not much more important to endeavour, as Robert Stradling advocates, to help the pupils to find out this information for themselves and learn to analyse and weigh up facts, media material, the views of experts and speeches by politicians? Here is a concrete example of this approach to political education, taken from the Stradling report (p. 163).

When a live political issue is analysed, the pupils should receive tuition in:

- "appreciating the complexity of an issue (ie not reducing it to simple dichotomies, black and white terms, etc)

- sorting out the arguments of the various groups and individuals involved

- sorting out relevant from irrelevant background information

- knowing potential sources of information and hov to tap them

- recognising the gaps in information supplied

- evaluating the likely biases of the people supplying the information

- sorting out the similarities and differences in various accounts of an issue

- handling conflicting evidence or accounts of what has happened

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(1) B Crick and I Lister, "Political Literacy" in Crick and Porter, Political Education and Political Literacy, Longman, 1978, quoted by Robert Stradling, 2nd Strasbourg Conference on Parliamentary Democracy, op. cit., p. 167.

- examining critically the alternative causes and solutions proposed

- considering what motives people might have for supporting one particular explanation or solution."

At the very least, schools should, from a very early age, probably from primary school onwards - teach children three techniques which are essential to those who want to understand and/or go for politics. It should:

- Teach them to speak in public and develop an argument;

- Teach them to debate;

- Teach them to read the newspaper and watch television and critically appraise the way in which the news is presented.

Reference is often made, in connection with political education, to the need for training specifically geared to girls and women. If "proper" political education were provided at school, at both primary and secondary level, and at university - not forgetting adult education - it would be unnecessary to take any affirmative action for the benefit of women. Indeed, such action would simply relegate them to the ghetto of archetypal "incompetence", that is, give credit to the already widely held idea that men have innate political skill whereas women are "naturally" incompetent, thereby providing male politicians with an additional pretext for retaining their stronghold ... until such time as women are trained. This is an area in which it is necessary to learn from the past. History shows that demands for training for women backfire. In France, for instance, between the wars, the suffragettes made proper education for women a prerequisite for their obtaining citizenship, with the result that French women were among the last in Europe to obtain the vote. "A touching willingness to prove worthy of the rights they were demanding ... which must have greatly amused the male politicians of the time, who had few scruples about the methods they used to postpone, indefinitely, recognition of women's political rights", says Huguette Bouchardeau (1).

2. Implementation

It is essential that it should be the top authorities in each country that implement this educational strategy, since the measures referred to concern teacher training, curricula and teaching methods. Here again, any action depends on the existence of a firm political resolve to use education to combat the tendency to exclude whole categories of citizens, both male and female, from politics.

Might it not be useful, in order to prompt states to innovate in the field of political education, to make an exhaustive survey of recent measures taken by the various countries? Who practises democracy at school and how, and with what results? What is the state of civic education in schools? What countries provide education of this kind? What is its content, and at what school level is it provided?

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(1) Huguette Bouchardeau, "Pas d'histoire, les femmes ...", Paris, Syros, 1977, p. 39.

Consideration should also be given to back-up action and measures to enhance these educational reforms, particularly in the form of public campaigns. Why not consider politically educational television advertisements, which would bring civic education directly into households and families, where socialisation first takes place? If they were shown at peak viewing times, they would help to elicit an interest in the democratic process among men and women and prevent those who are denied knowledge from also being excluded from democracy because they have no alternative but to take refuge in political alienation.

In any event, as was wryly pointed out at the 2nd Strasbourg Conference on Parliamentary Democracy, "the media must be better integrated into educational systems if people [are] to be taught to be sensitive to the nuances and implications of the information being fed to them by the media". (1) In some countries, such as the Federal Republic of Germany, the broadcasting and major parliamentary debates on radio and television seems to have proved its usefulness in teaching people about democracy. Surely this experiment could easily be extended to other countries?

II. A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO POLITICS

> "Democracies should encourage participation in political life by all citizens, who should be able to exercise their electoral rights and engage in active politics at local, regional, national and international level. This presupposes the creation of institutional conditions conducive to greater participation, particularly by women". (2)

There is no point in defending democracy if the workings of democracy are not such as to give it credibility. It is therefore the system itself that needs to be changed. Two types of action can be contemplated here:

- Measures to make the political system more democratic, which, even if they are not specifically geared to women, will directly affect them, insofar as women belong to what is commonly called a disadvantaged minority;

- Remedial measures catering for women, and women alone, to make up for the specific discrimination they have had to suffer.

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(1) Mr Beysen (Belgium), 2nd Strasbourg Conference on Parliamentary Democracy, op. cit., p. 175).

(2) Louis Jung, Closing speech at the 2nd Strasbourg Conference on Parliamentary Democracy, op. cit., p. 324.

A. MAKING POLITICS MORE DEMOCRATIC

Included under this heading are all strategies for broadening the base for political recruitment and removing its somewhat "oligarchical" character so that politics is no longer the luxury of the privileged - an activity confined to the citizens who have the most personal "resources", in the form of free time, money and social and cultural assets. The idea is to facilitate access to politics for categories of the population who are usually poorly represented in the political arena, including women (but also young people, disadvantaged sections of society and so on), so that they, in turn, broaden the scope of politics and power.

1. Action

If such a strategy is to be pursued, short-term action must be taken to remove everything in the political system that is a barrier to advancement of minorities. These internal obstacles certainly exist and are difficult to stamp out - for legally egalitarian rules can have inegalitarian effects. Numerous institutional reforms are needed to improve selection processes, training schemes and arrangements for the exercise of political office.

a. Public funding for political parties (1), which constitute the machinery of modern political systems, is probably the first measure to be introduced if politics are really to be made democratic. As was pointed out at the Second Strasbourg Conference on Parliamentary Democracy, "the State [cannot] fail to take account of the cost of politics". (2) The State has dealt with this political issue in different ways and with different arrangements in the various countries. In the Federal Republic of Germany public party funding has existed for a long time (3), whereas France is only now adopting this solution, and other countries have not passed legislation on the subject. Efforts should be made to introduce a system for State funding for political parties in order to achieve one of the main objectives, which is to ensure that politics is not confined to well-off members of the public and that any recurral in practice of the situation whereby exercise of the right to vote was conditional upon a rating system is prevented. In any event, steps should be taken to ensure that the relationship between money and politics is more open.

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(1) Certain laws and constitutions expressly state that political parties contribute to the formation of political will. See the German Political Parties Act (Section 1, sub-paragraph 2): "They affect public opinion", and the French Constitution of 4 October 1958 (Article 4): "Political parties and groups help to give expression to suffrage. They shall decide on and engage in their activities freely and shall respect the principles of national sovereignty and democracy."

(2) Sir Russel Johnson, Second Strasbourg Conference on Parliamentary Democracy, op. cit., p. 83.

(3) In the Federal Republic of Germany, government aid is pegged to the votes obtained by the various parties.

b. Introducing "egalitarian" electoral systems

The deterrent effects which certain electoral legislation has had in the past on the access of women - and other "minorities" - to politics cannot be underestimated. It is therefore necessary to change rules which merely help the same people to stay in power.

- The system of indirect suffrage for election to upper houses of parliament is not such as to ensure real democracy. Because it results (as in France) in a preponderance of municipal councillors, who are far more representative of small rural municipalities than of big cities, indirect suffrage tends to hinder the election of anyone who is not a local "dignitary". (1) This screening of representatives of the people, which is generally combined with other "devices" - length of the term of office, partial renewal, a higher eligibility age - usually ensures that upper houses of parliament are conservative and disinclined to promote women's rights, still less to admit large numbers of women. (2) Even though upper houses no longer have the power they used to have, the need for a democratic reform of the system for elections to the Senate is more urgent than ever now that we are reaching the end of the 20th century.

- So far the majority-vote system (the first-past-the-post system, as in the United Kingdom, or the two-ballot system, as in France) has proved a strong deterrent for outsiders wishing to stand, and an obstacle to their election. This system, which is usually based on small constituencies, accentuates the personal nature of the election: it favours the incumbent - the dignitary who has a "hold" on his territory - thus exacerbating the tendency for people to hold office in more than one capacity.

On the other hand, all the studies have shown that proportional representation systems (generally combined with a ballot based on lists) can, in certain circumstances, make for the representation of women (and favour candidates representing ethnic minorities). As the competition is less personalised and the elector votes not so much for a person - a dignitary - as for a party and a manifesto, this ballot system encourages women to stand for election and usually gives them a better chance of being elected. (In countries where women are new arrivals in politics, proportional representation is particularly helpful in enabling women to make their début in the electoral arena.)

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(1) Michel Reydellet shows, in a comparison of the posts held by the French parliamentarians in the two houses of parliament, that senators are more likely to hold office in more than one capacity and to hold a greater number of posts. Clearly, therefore, the system of indirect suffrage accentuates the proportion of local dignitaries in parliament. "Le cumul des mandats", Revue du Droit public et de la science politique en France et à l'étranger, 3, 1979, p. 715.

(2) It is common knowledge that the French Senate - which was, for a long time, called the "agricultural house" - distinguished itself because of its long-standing tradition of antifeminism: from 1919 to 1939, it was the Senate that, on several occasions, overrode the National Assembly's proposals that women be given the vote.

Yet the French elections in March 1986 (which were based on the system of proportional representation) show that one should not be unduly hasty in claiming that there is automatically a cause-and-effect relationship between proportional representation and larger numbers of women in parliament. (1) In fact, much depends on the way in which proportional representation is put into practice. When it takes place in large constituencies (or in a single constituency, as in the case of the European elections), women have a good chance of being included in large numbers among the candidates for election. "In multi-member constituencies, parties will find it prudent to nominate women since their absence would be noted." (2) When elections are held in a large number of small constituencies (eg the French "départements" in the case of the 1986 general election), the system again favours dignitaries who are well established locally, and women have virtually as little chance of being elected (and of being selected by the parties first) as in the majority-vote system.

Another proportional representation device can come to the aid of "minorities": the preferential vote, insofar as it allows electors to vote for representatives other than the "party figureheads". In the past, preferential votes have indisputably benefited women (consider, for instance, the 1971 Norvegian local elections, the 1979 European elections in Denmark and the November 1981 Belgian election for the reneval of the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate. (3) Preferential voting can, insofar as it can give a landslide victory to candidates at the bottom of the list, be a useful device for short-circuiting any misogyny on the part of biased party staff.

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(1) There was an abundance of female candidates in these elections (25% of the candidates were women) but only a handful of women were elected (5.8% of the people elected were women). This failure is partly due to the lapses of the female lobby when the lists were being drawn up. As they expected too much of this new system, politically committed women were not sufficiently vigilant. By the time they found out that their own staff had put them at the bottom of the list, it was too late: the dye was cast.

(2) Vernon Bogdanor, Second Strasbourg Conference on Parliamentary Democracy, op. cit., p. 77.

(3) See, in this connection, Janine Mossuz-Lavau and Mariette Sineau, The situation of women in the political process in Europe, Part II, Women in the political world in Europe, op. cit., pp. 74-80.

c. Encouraging turnover and the sharing of elective office

One of the major obstacles to access for new arrivals to positions of political responsibility can be the degree of "professionalisation" in politics, particularly when it means that a few people monopolise all the elected posts. This is due to the fact that people are allowed to hold office simultaneously in an unlimited number of capacities (as was the case in France before the 1985 Act) or quite simply to the fact that politicians as a category are becoming older, or that candidates can be re-elected indefinitely (as is the case in France or Italy, for instance). The result is that a "monopolistic class of top dignitaries stands in the way of young people and women wanting to enter public life, who could begin to learn the ropes by holding local office" (1). The ways of reversing this trend are familiar, though not always easy to put into practice: restrictions on the number of capacities in which people may hold office simultaneously, a ban on holding office simultaneously in specified capacities, ineligibility after two or three terms of office, or even ... age limits.

d. Improving the working and living conditions of elected representatives

Radical reforms are needed to wipe out political "elitism" and ensure that everyone, irrespective of social status and family situation, has the time and money to stand for election and hold office under satisfactory conditions. In many countries it is proving necessary, inter alia, to draw up a proper local and regional elected representatives' statute, in the form of a coherent set of rules governing elected office and adapted to the needs of the times. Reference is made, in this connection, to the conclusions of the report by Mr A de la Moussaye (2), some of which are in keeping with those in the report drawn up in France by Senator Marcel Debarge. (3) The most urgent recommendations include:

- paying local elected representatives financial "compensation" worthy of the name: "In the circumstances of the present day it is unreasonable to ask most citizens to make financial sacrifices as a consequence of their service to the community." (4) Arrangements should therefore be made: (a) to pay all local and regional elected representatives sufficient compensation to cover all the expenses incured in their duties, and (b) to provide decent remuneration for elected representatives with special responsibilities, in particular executive responsibilities.

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(1) Roger-Gérard Schwarzenberg, Le Monde of 12, 13 and 14 February 1978.

(2) Mr A de la Moussaye, Report on the status and working conditions of local and regional elected representatives, Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 8 September 1983 (CPL (18) 6), 51 pages.

(3) Report drawn up by Marcel Debarge, Socialist Senator for Seine-Saint-Denis, in his capacity as parliamentarian appointed to assist the Minister of the Interior and Decentralisation, 1982.

(4) De la Moussaye report, op. cit., p. 5.

- Making provision for the right to time off from work and improving job security. In the private sector there are few occupations in which it is possible to take two hours off in the middle of the afternoon to attend a meeting. Employers could, for instance, be obliged to introduce flexible working hours or even allow time off for certain people in positions of political responsibility. Elected representatives should also be fully protected against the risk of being punished by dismissal for performing their duties.

- Making it easier for representatives who lose office to go back to work. In some countries a severance allowance is paid to mayors (Denmark) and to aldermen and members of the executive (the Netherlands) to cover the period between completion of their term of elective office and the start of a new job.

If considered in this way, as proper paid employment, the job of elected local representative could become accessible to categories other than dignitaries, pensioners and civil servants, who are often the only people who are sufficiently well off and have enough time or sufficient job security to embark on a winning course in the race for public office.

The working and living conditions of elected representatives, which, in many countries, no longer meet the requirements of the modern world, should also be adapted. In particular, it is necessary:

- To improve logistic back-up and provide elected representatives with offices, secretarial services and documentation;

- To improve their training, in particular by giving them the means of acquiring the knowledge they need about a number of key issues and introducing training schemes involving courses, seminars and the provision of documentation;

- To relieve elected representatives of family responsibilities.

What has been said about working women generally is particularly true of those who want to go into politics. It is absolutely essential to ensure that it is no longer a feat for a working woman with small children to hold government office, but that it is perfectly possible. Public facilities, including day-nurseries, should be made available to all elected representatives with family responsibilities or, failing that, they should be paid allowances so that they no longer face the dilemma of choosing between politics and the children. Indeed, facilities for looking after young children should be made available to all parliamentarians and candidates for parliamentary office. (1)

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(1) As Mr Fletcher said as far back as 1975, "It matters little that legislation ensuring formal equality between the sexes exists, as long as a female candidate for an election cannot find a crèche where she can leave her child while campaigning". Report on the political rights and position of women (19 August 1975), Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, Strasbourg, 1976, Doc. 3643, p. 11.

e. Making the senior civil service more democratic

Increasingly, top government positions are held by men from the senior civil service, which is now the epicentre of power. Since these men have a growing role in the political system, it would be serious if women were to be elected in large numbers to parliamentary assemblies but to remain in the ante-room of the civil service. Yet that is the prospect in sight. In such countries as Sweden and Norway, the increase in the number of female senior civil servants has not kept pace - far from it - with the rise in the number of women elected to political assemblies. The State, whatever the country, by no means sets a good example when it comes to the advancement of women (or of disadvantaged sections of society), although "everyone believes it should lead the way and be at the forefront of experiments in this area". (1) It is difficult to identify exactly what reforms are needed, insofar as recruitment methods differ from country to country. One thing is certain: it is being felt necessary nearly everywhere, to broaden the social base for recruitment to the senior civil service so that it is no longer seen as a "private hunting ground" for a very select group: middle-class men. In France, the civil service elite is selected through the "Ecole Nationale d'Administration": recruitment of this kind, through a prestigious "grande école" and stiff competitive examination is known to be undemocratic. What is perhaps not so often pointed out is that it is also a major obstacle to increasing the number of women in political bodies and the civil service in France (so far, the competitiveness and lengthy preparation needed to pass these examinations has severely penalised women). (2)

2. Implementation

Most of the technical remedies designed to speed up turnover among the elite and, indirectly, make for a better balance of men and women require legislation. It must be remembered that "the inclination of the people in power to hold onto it [is] so strong that voluntary measures prove to have very little success". (3) In recent times certain reforms have successfully been carried out by governments, mainly in two fields:

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(1) Report submitted to the Minister for Women's rights, Les femmes en France dans une société d'inégalité, Paris, La Documentation française, 1982, p. 52.

(2) Admittedly, there is an internal competitive examination for admission to the Ecole Nationale d'Administration reserved for civil servants, but it has been organised in such a way that it has failed to give rise to proper internal promotion. See Ezra Suleiman, Les hauts fonctionnaires et la politique, Paris, Edition du Seuil, 1976, p. 35: "Far from encouraging internal promotion in France, the reform has made it impossible. The fact of providing a few civil servants with an opportunity (through the internal competitive examination) to be admitted to the ENA has meant that others have been prevented from moving up the hierarchy from inside". Female civil servants have been the first to bear the brunt of the system.

(3) Report on women in decision-making centres, drawn up on behalf of the European Parliament Commmittee on Women's Rights. Rapporteur: Mrs Marietta Giannakou-Koutsikou, document A2-169/88, p. 6.

- Political party funding (cf. the French Act of 11 March 1988);

- Restrictions on holding office in more than one capacity at the same time (cf. the Belgian Act of 1984, which makes the office of Member of the European Parliament incompatible with that of Member of the Belgian Parliament or member of the executive of a town with over 50,000 inhabitants. See, also, the French Act of 30 December 1985, which provides that "no-one may hold elected office in more than two capacities"). (1)

Furthermore, the adoption by the European Parliament in 1988 of the report by Geoffrey Hoon, who advocated making membership of the European Parliament incompatible with membership of a national parliament (2) should prompt other countries to follow Belgium's example and introduce legislation prohibiting the holding of both posts simultaneously.

The prospects for other reforms are not always rosy: the practice of indirect suffrage for election to upper houses of parliament and the use of the majority vote are often firmly rooted in national traditions which seem difficult to change, or which those in power do not want to change, for political reasons (in France majority voting, which was abolished by the Left Wing, was restored by the Right Wing, and there is no prospect at present of proportional representation). Nor is there any more talk of changing the Senatorial Electoral Act, for the possibility of reforming the Senate was struck dead by the failure of the Gaullist attempt. The preparation of a statute for local elected representatives would be more in keeping with the current mood and with the logic of widespread decentralisation. The main obstacle to such a statute is its high cost. In France, it was estimated in 1984 that even a modest improvement in the compensation paid to elected representatives would cost 1,800 million francs. To provide 48 hours' training per office and per elected representative would cost a further 3,000 million francs. (3) Now that the Act making provision for political party financing - which also costs money - is about to be adopted in France, there is no certainty that a statute for local elected representatives will be introduced. (4)

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(1) The posts in question being those of Member of Parliament, Senator, Member of the European Parliament, regional councillor, member of the Paris Council, mayor of a municipality with more than 20,000 inhabitants, deputy mayor of a municipality with over 100,000 inhabitants.

(2) See report on the incompatibility between the office of Member of the European Parliament and certain other public elected office, drawn up on behalf of the European Parliament Committee on Legal Affairs and Citizens' Rights (Rapporteur: Geoffrey Hoon), European Parliament, document A2-0065/88.

(3) See Le Monde of 21 November 1984.

(4) That is why the Communist Party opposed the Political Party Funding Act: it would have preferred to use taxpayers' money to finance a statute for local elected representatives.

In any event, Mr de la Moussaye's report shows that (regional, national and international) associations of local authorities have an important role to play in promoting such reforms. In Scandinavia associations of this kind have devised sophisticated training schemes for local elected representatives, which could usefully serve as a model. (1)

B. MORE WOMEN IN POLITICS

> "Whenever a woman is in a position to show that she is in control of a difficult situation, has mastered a tricky file or has a post normally thought to be reserved for men, and yet she is neither one-eyed nor hunchbacked, she contributes to the unconscious transformation of the image of women in the public eye." (2)

Remedial measures are the only way even to attempt to make up for the age-old exclusion of women and improve women's participation in public affairs now. The objective of affirmative action of this kind is twofold:

- To increase the number of women in positions of responsibility, so as to cross the critical threshold below which women can only be a powerless minority and little short of hostages in the political arena;

- To put an end to the practice whereby newly promoted women are confined to so-called female sectors, ie supporting roles and charitable works.

Clearly, politically active women have not acquired influence and power to match their numbers, even in the most feminist countries, for instance the Scandinavian countries. We must therefore put an end to the argument, still widely used by politicians (3), to the effect that there is a lack of competent or politically motivated women. The report which Sweden presented at the first European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men is worth quoting in this connection: "In a welfare society like Sweden, ... there are sufficient women with adequate resources in terms of education, employment and family situation, to occupy half of the places in politics. And yet women do not participate to the same extent as men. Equal resources have not meant equal participation. The individual woman has therefore been accused of lack of determination or motivation. This phenomenon has been dubbed 'blame the victim', and it saves the political establishment from being pilloried". (4)

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(1) Op. cit., section 4.4.

(2) Françoise Giroud, Le Nouvel Observateur, 10-16 November 1988.

(3) One is usually astounded by the clear consciences men in positions of responsibility have about under-representation of women in the governing bodies of political parties and trade unions. Take, for instance, a recent statement made by André Bergeron ("Force Ouvrière" trade union) on television, to the effect that the reason why there are so few women in trade unions is that "very often women themselves cannot assume certain kinds of responsibility because of their other obligations". Reproduced in Libération of 12/13 November 1988.

(4) Proceedings of the first European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men, op. cit., p. 47.

The political establishment mainly means the political parties. For instance, a survey conducted in France reveals that political parties, although "in theory practising open selection and providing political training for all, are in fact oligarchies which are closed to women, in particular. They are seen and described as such by women, who are invariably relegated to the party fringes. They are bodies designed by men for men, who, on finding themselves together, are never aware that they are excluding women, but only of the fact that they are making history and working for the good of mankind". (1) Far from being peculiar to France, this male hold on key posts in the party machinery certainly seems to be universal. (2)

1. Action

The action needed will almost invariably be based on the quota principle. The quotas may be unofficial in certain cases, if, for instance, the aim is to increase the number of women "from the top downwards" and place women in important political posts (government posts, in particular). In other cases, the quotas may be official, if the aim is that the legislation or, failing that, political parties should introduce quotas for women for lists of election candidates (and leadership posts in organisations).

a. Co-opting women to top government posts

There are those who believe it is necessary to "motivate" women to occupy positions of responsibility. Is the most effective form of motivation not the display of genuine determination to give them posts that carry power?

When the barriers are too firmly established, whether as a result of human practices or institutional structures, it is tempting - and easy - to create an "in-draught" from the top and co-opt women to top positions - Cabinet and ministerial adviser posts and posts in other authorities which are filled by appointment.

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(1) Mariette Sineau, Des femmes en politique, op. cit., p. 67.

(2) See, in particular, the findings of the survey conducted by the UN for the Nairobi Conference: "The political parties themselves did not encourage women and did not provide them with the necessary support ... Many countries, with the exception of the centrally planned economy countries, indicated that political parties were still 'men-heavy at the top' and that 'male hostility to the intrusion of women' as well as 'general prejudice against women in politics' were effective realities. It was also pointed out that women's issues were rarely advocated by political parties". World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women, A/CONF. 116/5/Add. 1, 1-5 December 1984, pp. 23 and 24.

In some countries there are statutory requirements ensuring a minimum number of women on public boards and committees. In these cases, one can talk of official quotas. This applies in Belgium (a decree provides that no more than two-thirds of the members of the Media Board may be of the same sex). Similarly, in the Scandinavian countries legislation has been passed to ensure equal representation of women and men on state committees and boards. This deliberate policy has borne fruit, especially in Sweden and Norway, and is tending to spread to other countries (it is under consideration in Denmark).

In the absence of legislation, some countries have applied unofficial quotas, endeavouring to appoint a "compulsory" number of women to senior posts and, what is more, sometimes in sectors considered to be a male preserve. For instance, in France "the poor representation of women in elected institutions is offset by the presence of women in nominated posts" (1) or at least some of them (2): in the private offices of the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister, Ministerial adviser posts, governments ... and, recently, the Commission of the European Communities. (3) The fact that women have been put into high places where they are not usually found (in France, the office of Pierre Arpaillange, Minister of Justice, in which over 60% of the members are women, is run by a woman) or in charge of ministerial portfolios in areas other than the social field (agriculture, industry, Europe, etc) has also helped, to some extent, to relieve women of "forced specialisation" - the re-establishment by the welfare state of the old dichotomy between women/social affairs and men/politics.

Such action provides a means whereby the State can make up for the deficiencies of the political parties, which have failed to make arrangements to improve the position of women. It should therefore be encouraged, and the government should always, when possible, endeavour to broaden the eligibility criteria for recruitment to senior posts, so that they do not unduly disadvantage women (as they are disadvantaged in France by the fact that the main State bodies are a breeding ground for the elite).

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(1) Memorandum submitted by the Italian delegation, Proceedings of the First European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men, op. cit., p. 77.

(2) But not others, such as the Constitutional Council, which is the supreme court, and where no woman has ever sat among the nine "wise men".

(3) On 27 October 1988, France appointed Christiane Scrivener, Member of the European Parliament, member of the Commission of the European Communities. Previously, the first woman to hold such a post (also in 1988) was Vasso Papandreou, appointed by the Greek Government.

These appointments to top posts - important though they are symbolically, since they help to change society's image of women - should not become a pretext for overlooking the "black spots" and refraining from structural reforms. It will be remembered that in France, in 1936, the socialist Leon Blum chose to include three women in the government rather than pass an Act of Parliament giving women the vote.

b. Quotas: a means of forcing the doors of political assemblies and parties

Needless to say, universal suffrage is still the ideal means of access to politics - even though entry on the basis of qualifications and expertise is gaining ground. Women should therefore get themselves elected at all levels in political assemblies, not forgetting the bottom rung - local government. In the countries where women's political status is beginning to improve - the Scandinavian countries - it was initially at the bottom level that assemblies began to have more women members. "Local politics are the gateway to the Swedish Riksdag" (1) as the Swedish delegation to the First European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men pointed out.

No country has made provision for the quota principle in its electoral legislation, and the fact that the French Constitutional Council repealed the 1982 Act (2) has probably done nothing to encourage other countries to pass similar legislation. Yet the countries which ratified the United Nations Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women thereby acquired a kind of legal safeguard, since the principle of temporary preferential treatment is provided for in Article 4. (3)

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(1) Proceedings of the conference, op. cit, p. 40.

(2) The nine wise men rejected the section of the Act introducing a quota system, in the name of the equality of all citizens before the law - a principle safeguarded both by Article 3 of the Constitution and by Article 6 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. See, in this connection, Danièle Loschak, "Les hommes politiques, 'Les sages' (?) ... et les femmes (à propos de la décision du Conseil constitutionnel du 18 novembre 1982)", Droit Social, No. 2, February 1983, pp. 131-137.

(3) As soon as a State ratifies the United Nations Convention without making reservations in respect of Article 4 (1), several "guarantees of crucial significance become entrenched in its domestic legislation", including the following: "That where positive discrimination or preferential treatment is granted to the person or group of persons of one sex, it will never be construed as an illegal derogation from the general principle of equality between the sexes provided that any such special measures are temporary and serve to bring about equality between men and women more rapidly", Eliane Vogel-Polsky, Positive action and the constitutional and legislative impediments to its implementation in the member states of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 1989.

In the absence of legislation introducing and legitimating the principle of a minimum percentage of women on lists of election candidates, parties should be encouraged to adopt such quotas themselves (and if possible include them in their statutes). From the parties' point of view, the expected electoral benefits may, in the future, provide the best of incentives to take steps of this kind. It is striking to note that many major European political parties have established, statutorily or unofficially, quotas for women, both for applicants for the various party organs and for election candidates. These measures have been taken in the hope of winning round the female electorate. For instance, it was for this reason that the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) recently decided to introduce a compulsory quota of 40% of women at all levels of the hierarchy. (1)

Experience shows that this deliberate policy is the only effective way of getting round misogyny in political parties. In Scandinavia, women's breakthrough into political institutions has, let it not be forgotten, been achieved partly through a quota policy introduced by the parties. Measures of this kind are not "a paternalistic solution which degrades women, but a solution which indicates the extent of the degree of sincerity in all those very important declarations about equality, and changes in legislation". (2)

c. More women in the senior civil service

It has not been possible to ensure genuine equality for women in the senior civil service by means of laws alone. Legal reforms now need to be followed by a "revolution in mentalities" in an area - the public and para-public sector - where "the traditionalist view that only men have the qualities of authority and command needed to uphold and serve the interests of the state still prevails". (3) Specific measures are a means of overcoming prejudice provided they are taken by authorities that are determined to remove the barriers. Governments first need to ensure that women candidates are included in lists for appointments to senior posts. They should then use their discretion more often to appoint more women to senior managerial posts. Lastly, generally speaking, it would be a good idea if each Ministry reported to the government at regular intervals on the situation as regards female staff and changes in this respect. In France, for instance, the Act of 7 May 1982, which upholds the principle of equal access for men and women to civil service jobs, obliges the government to inform parliament every two years of the

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(1) After several intermediate stages, in 1998 it is to be compulsory for the SPD to have 40% of women on all elected bodies, both internal party organs and the various elected bodies based on the West German democratic system.

(2) Melina Mercouri, Proceedings of the Athens Conference, op. cit., p. 170.

(3) Les femmes en France dans une société d'inégalité, report submitted to the Minister for Women's Rights, Paris, la Documentation française, 1982, No. 52.

steps taken to ensure that this principle is observed at all levels in the hierarchy. (1) To give impetus to this policy of promoting women and to back it up, governments, particularly those without a Ministry of Women's Rights, would be wise to set up a unit in the Ministry responsible for the civil service to promote equal opportunities in government departments.

In certain member states, female civil servants have enjoyed special facilities, but, far from giving them an advantage in their careers, these provisions have merely relegated them further to the fringe. At least, that has been the case in France, where a number of advantages confined, by law, to women (2) (leave of absence to look after sick children, length of service credited to them for pension purposes because they have had children, and the option of drawing a pension after only 15 years' work if they have three or more children) have had very negative effects, in that they have entrenched women in their child-rearing role.

It therefore seems necessary to ensure, in both the public sector and the private sector (3), that any facilities afforded to people to enable them to reconcile working life with family life are granted to both sexes.

2. Implementation

Needless to say, it is the authorities that provide the driving force for the implementation of such a policy: the State, the government and Ministry of Women's Rights. But a deliberate policy carried out from the top downwards has its limits, as Andrée Michel pointed out in a study commissioned by the Council of Europe: "Positive Action programmes initiated, administered and monitored solely by the State are liable to become empty shells because they

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(1) The circular of 24 January 1983 sets out a proper programme of reforms designed to achieve such equality in practice: neutral titles (which do not suggest one or other sex) for posts, special training for female civil servants, the advocating of a deliberate policy of appointing women to positions of responsibility, and statistical reviews of the situation.

(2) Since 20 July 1982, any government servant, male or female, with a dependent child has been entitled to paid leave of absence to look after a sick child.

(3) As we know, the European Court of Justice recently convicted France of failing to observe equality between the sexes at work. "The judges shrewdly drew attention, inter alia, to the lack of parental rights for fathers, with reference to the so-called Roudy Act (of July 1983) on occupational equality between women and men, which they considered did not go far enough. Special rights for women (such as leave to look after sick children) should not be afforded only to female workers; men are entitled to the same facilities", Libération, 12 December 1988.

deprive themselves of the creative impetus which various groups ... can give them". (1) Government action therefore needs to be extended, spread out and supported at the grass roots by feminist organisations and lobbies which, within or outside the institutions (political parties, government departments, universities, etc) provide an impetus, put forvard demands, lay down requirements and develop solidarity networks. Only women's lobbies can legitimately and effectively speak on behalf of "women everywhere" (2), ie all the women who are not able to obtain seats in assemblies.

Although the use of associations was initially rejected by the radical feminists of the seventies, this is no longer the case. Most feminist groups rediscovered, at the same time, the virtues of power and the merits of formal structures and organised themselves into associations precisely in order to be recognised as official spokesvomen by the authorities.

In particular, interest groups are irreplaceable when it comes to orchestrating campaigns to win round public opinion to female candidates. As we have seen, in the Federal Republic of Germany, by launching such campaigns in the year preceding the 1987 general election, women's organisations were influential in the various parties' promises to put up more women for election (promises which were, by and large, kept, since the proportion of female members of the Bundestag increased from 10% to 15%). Similarly, it is largely because of pressure from the feminist lobby that there has been a surge in the number of women in political assemblies in the Scandinavian countries: women's organisations, which are highly active in this part of northern Europe and stir things up, have played a leading part in alerting the electorate to the need to involve women in the management of public affairs.

These organisations can also play a key role in what has been called the "strategy of lists". (3) This strategy consists in drawing up lists of "qualified" women who are prepared to accept an appointment or stand for election, so that the argument to the effect that there is a lack of available, competent women crumbles. In 1987, the Fawcett Society and a group of 300 people in the United Kingdom took such action, through their campaign "Women into Public Life". (4)

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(1) Positive action for the benefit of women, op. cit., p. 54.

(2) Marie-Claude Vayssade, General Rapporteur, 2nd Strasbourg Conference on Parliamentary Democracy, op. cit. p. 294.

(3) Margaret Gillet, "Strategies for power", paper presented at the Second International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women, Groningen, April 1984, p. 8.

(4) At the launching ceremony, which took place in the presence of the political party leaders or their representatives, the names of 600 women who had all the qualifications for top jobs in society were announced.

In addition to election propaganda campaigns of the type "Vote for a woman" or "Give them a chance", women's organisations could usefully wage information campaigns. They could:

- Announce figures for the under-representation of women in national and international political institutions;

- Make it known, with opinion-poll figures as back-up, that European public opinion is becoming less and less hostile to senior civil service jobs being held by women. (To the crucial question "Would you have as much confidence in a woman as in a man as member of the national parliament?", 67% of the Europeans interrogated in 1987 at the request of the Commission of the European Communities answered "yes" (no difference), whereas only 43% answered "yes" in 1978. (1) This means an increase in 24 percentage points in the numbers with favourable opinions within the space of nine years);

- Publicise the fact - carefully kept silent by political parties - that women generally suffer more from the internal misogyny in political circles than from the misogyny of the electorate.

Lastly, interest groups now have a role to play in lobbying both the government and political parties. From the government, they must demand that the Ministry responsible for publishing electoral statistics make the absence of women visible, ie make all the published findings available, adding a breakdown by sex. Although the Nordic countries, the Anglo-Saxon countries and Switzerland are above suspicion in this respect (accurate data, usually produced by the political assemblies, are accessible and published), this is not the case in other countries (in particular in France, where the Ministry of the Interior is particularly "discreet").

- Interest groups usually have more difficulty in putting direct pressure on political parties. They would be ten times more effective if they could act in liaison with groups of women within the parties. Experience shows that internal lobbies can have a great impact. The example of the "Vrouw en Maatschappij" (set up in 1973) in the Belgian CVP is, for example, a model worth exporting. Admittedly, the current climate is not always propitious for making room for women in political parties, any more than it is for the establishment of more powerful feminist associations. In France all the feminist experiments carried out in traditional organisations have failed, and the decline in the number of people giving heed to many feminist organisations is giving cause for concern.

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(1) Cf. Men and Women of Europe in 1987, Supplement No. 26, Women of Europe, Commission of the European Communities, 1987.

CONCLUSION

Whereas most European women have, over the last 40 years, found themselves at the heart of the major changes in society - the growth of the service sector, the increasing amount of salaried employment, the democratisation of secondary and higher education, and so on - they have been left by the wayside in political circles.

Women no longer want to be excluded from democracy, for they believe, more than ever in these times of recession, in the virtues of sharing: sharing tasks in private life, but also sharing in public.

Nobody would risk banking on equality being established between men and women at all levels in political institutions by the end of the 20th century. Yet women have a chance of achieving this objective in the not too distant future, for two reasons:

- They are an electoral issue in the rivalry between political parties, which are increasingly endeavouring to outdo one another with measures designed to win round the female electorate;

- They represent, if not hope that the world will change, at least a sign of the times. It is striking to note that the proportion of women in the private sector has become an indicator of modernity and that, conversely, the most outdated firms are the most misogynous ones. (1)

The same scale of values is gradually being adopted - very belatedly - in political circles. The parties considered obsolete are the parties without women. To quote a description by a journalist from Le Monde of the French Radical Party on the occasion of its 89th congress (in December 1988): "The Radicals in Valois seem to have hit rock bottom this time: no more ideas, no more young people and no women". (2)

Could this kind of rating not soon be introduced throughout Europe, and countries like France and the United Kingdom, which are tending to be left on the fringe because they are not putting more women into their institutions, be contrasted with other countries which are making greater progress in this respect, including the Scandinavian countries, but also, recently, the Federal Republic of Germany and Italy?

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(1) See Eliane Vogel-Polsky, Study on positive action programmes as strategies to integrate female workers and other hard-to-place groups into the labour market, EEC, V/30/83-EN, Document No. 34. Analysing the motives of employers who promote affirmative action programmes, the author shows that they are usually based on the need for economical staff management (optimisation of staff potential). In addition to economic motives, there may be publicity motives: "Some companies use this new product 'Women' to maintain their brand image as a leader in social progress: equality is a moral value upheld by a humanistic enterprise" (Volvo, A G, The Belgian bank, Servier), (pp. 60 and 61).

(2) Daniel Carton, "Le caveau de la République", Le Monde of 13 December 1988.